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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
10/825,185	04/16/2004	Jack E. Howard	839-1540	8301

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EXAMINER

TERESINSKI, JOHN

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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2858

DATE MAILED: 03/06/2006

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

10/825,185

Applicant(s)

HOWARD ET AL.

Examiner

John Teresinski

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-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --
Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 22 December 2005.
- 2a) ☐ This action is FINAL. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-40 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) 18-23 is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-17 and 24-40 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
- ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 - ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 - ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- ☒ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date 7/6/04, 7/26/05
- ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____
- ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152)
- ☐ Other: _____

DETAILED ACTION

Election/Restrictions

Claims 18-23 are withdrawn from further consideration pursuant to 37 CFR 1.142(b) as being drawn to a nonelected invention, there being no allowable generic or linking claim.

Election was made **without** traverse in the reply filed on December 22, 2005.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102

The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(a) the invention was known or used by others in this country, or patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country, before the invention thereof by the applicant for a patent.

Claims 1-3, 6, 10-12, 14, 24-26, 28, 33, 34 and 37 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(a) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent Publication No. 2002/0070729 to Muller.

Regarding claims 1 and 28, Muller discloses an electronic proximity switch method and device including:

positioning said capacitive sensor proximate to the surface such that the displacement is a distance of a gap between the surface and one of the plates (paragraphs 1, 38-39, Fig. 5 elements 3, 4);

applying a high frequency signal to the plates (paragraph 24, Fig. 5 elements 2-4);

applying the high frequency signal and a signal from a sensor plate of the conductive plates to control a voltage gain of an amplifier in the circuit, said signal from the sensor plate being indicative of the displacement between the sensor and the surface (Fig. 5);

differentiating an output of the amplifier and the high frequency signal (paragraph 42, Fig. 5 element 24), and

determining a value of the displacement/a value of the property of the medium based on the difference between the output of the amplifier and the high frequency signal (ie. determining the approach of a trigger to activate the proximity switch see paragraphs 39-44).

Regarding claims 2 and 33, Muller discloses sensing a difference between a peak of the output of the amplifier and a peak of the high frequency signal (paragraph 40-44).

Regarding claim 3, Muller discloses applying the signal from the sensor plate and the high frequency signal as inputs to an operational amplifier (Fig. 5 elements 2-4, 21 and 22).

Regarding claims 6 and 14, Muller discloses applying the signal from the sensor plate and the high frequency signal as inputs to an operational amplifier, and wherein differentiating further comprises applying an output of the operational amplifier and the high frequency signal as inputs to a difference amplifier which generates a cyclical difference signal indicative of the gap, and applying the cyclical difference signal to a peak detector which generates a signal indicative of a peak value of the cyclical signal, and wherein said peak value is indicative of the gap (paragraphs 40-43, Fig. 5).

Regarding claims 10 and 24, Muller discloses positioning the capacitive sensor proximate to the medium, such that the medium is capacitively coupled to the sensor plate (paragraphs 1, 38-39, Fig. 5 elements 3, 4);

applying a high frequency signal to the sensor plate and to the active shield plate, wherein the medium affects a response of the sensor plate to the high frequency signal (paragraph 24, Fig. 5 elements 2-4);

applying a signal induced on the sensor circuit by the high frequency signal and the sensor plate to control a voltage gain of an amplifier in the circuit, said applied sensor signal being indicative of the medium (Fig. 5);

differentiating the output of the amplifier and the high frequency signal (paragraph 42, Fig. 5 element 24), and

determining a value indicative of the medium based on the difference between the applied signal and the high frequency signal (ie. determining the approach of a trigger to activate the proximity switch see paragraphs 39-44).

Regarding claims 11, 12 and 25 and 26, Muller discloses the medium is a gap between the sensor plate and a surface, and the value is a distance across the gap (ie. capacitive proximity switch see paragraphs 39 and 40).

Regarding claim 34, see claim 3 above.

Regarding claim 37, see claim 6 above.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

Claims 4, 5, 7-9, 13, 15-17, 27, 29-32, 35, 36, and 38-40 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Muller in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,307,385 to Tardif et al..

Regarding claims 4 and 35, Muller does not disclose applying the output of the amplifier as feedback to the signal from the sensor plate. Tardif et al. discloses a method and device for measuring capacitance of a capacitive sensor having a differential amplifier (Fig. 3, element 13) receiving input from a sensor/capacitive plate (1) and the amplifier applying the output of the amplifier as feedback to the signal from the sensor plate (Fig. 3, see element 13 with feed back loop). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to include applying the output of the amplifier as feedback to the signal from the sensor plate as taught by Tardif et al. into Muller for the purpose of improving overall stability of the measurement circuitry.

Regarding claims 5 and 36, Muller does not disclose linearizing the difference between the output of the amplifier and the high frequency signal. Tardif et al. discloses linearizing the difference between the output of the amplifier and the high frequency signal (column 6 lines 45-54). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to include linearizing the results as taught by Tardif et al. into Muller for the purpose of determining the value of the real displacement while accounting for parasitic effects.

Regarding claims 7, 8, 15, 16, 38 and 39, Muller discloses the sensor plate, an active shield plate, wherein said high frequency signal is applied to the sensor plate and to the active shield plate (Fig. 5 elements 2-4). Muller does not disclose a passive shield plate and further comprises connecting the passive shield plate to a ground via a resistive connection/cable and grounding the passive shield plate and coupling the passive shield plate to the high frequency signal via a resistive conductive path. Tardif et al. discloses a passive shield plate (6), wherein

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said passive shield plate is insulated from the active shield plate (4) and the sensor plate (1), and said method further comprises connecting the passive shield plate to a ground via a resistive connection/cable and grounding the passive shield plate and coupling the passive shield plate to the high frequency signal via a resistive conductive path (Fig. 3, passive shield plate 6 is capacitively coupled to sensor plate 1, which is coupled to the voltage source through a resistance). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to include a passive shield plate as taught by Tardif et al. into Muller for the purpose of reducing the effects of external objects.

Regarding claims 9, 17 and 40, Muller discloses monitoring the high frequency signal for a direct current (dc) signal induced by the coupling of the passive shield plate and, when a dc signal is detected, inhibiting the determination of the value of the displacement (ie. filtering extraneous peaks, paragraph 9).

Regarding claims 13, 27, 29 and 31, Muller does not disclose a fluid medium. Tardif et al. discloses the medium is a fluid and the value is indicative of a dielectric/impurities of the fluid (column 3 lines 23-40). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to incorporate the capacitive sensor with a fluid medium as taught by Tardif et al. into Muller for the purpose of more accurately evaluating moving parts in a machine environment.

Regarding claims 30 and 32, Muller does not disclose a solid medium. Tardif et al. discloses the medium is solid and the value is indicative of a dielectric/impurities of the fluid (ie. moisture level in wood, see column 3 lines 23-40). It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to incorporate the capacitive sensor

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with a solid medium as taught by Tardif et al. into Muller for the purpose of more accurately evaluating moving parts in a machine environment.

Conclusion


Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to John Teresinski whose telephone number is (571) 272-2235. The examiner can normally be reached on M-F 8:30 - 5:00.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Diane Lee can be reached on (571) 272-2399. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).

JT
JT

February 28, 2006


ANJAN DEB
PRIMARY EXAMINER